

I want to thank Congresswoman Patsy Mink for inviting me here today to discuss the "TANF Reauthorization Act of 2001" (H.R. 3113), a bill I am cosponsoring. This legislation, along with Representative Ben Cardin's legislation, the "Next Step in Reforming Welfare Act," which I am also cosponsoring, both change the focus of our nation's welfare laws by improving the lives of the most vulnerable in society rather than simply punishing them for the misfortune of being poor.

The true test of a safety net program is how it improves the lives of beneficiaries during an economic recession, not just in periods of economic growth. Our current system is just beginning to confront this test. To ensure that our welfare programs succeed in these difficult economic times, they must focus on the services and needs of the poor and help raise them out of poverty.

Congresswoman Mink's bill, the "TANF Reauthorization Act of 2001" redirects the goal of the TANF program to that of poverty reduction, requires states to better assist hard-to-serve TANF recipients, bans arbitrary and punitive sanctions, rewards recipients who work and provides child care to poor working families.

The most important aspect of this bill is redirecting the goal of the TANF program to that of poverty reduction. The bill replaces the draconian idea that the purpose of welfare is to kick TANF recipients off the rolls as fast as possible. It accomplishes this by making child poverty reduction an explicit goal of TANF and by providing \$150 million each year in incentive grants to states who reduce child poverty.

This bill directs resources to TANF recipients who suffer from disabilities, substance abuse, domestic violence, and lack of proficiency in English. It requires states to screen recipients to determine if they need rehabilitative or educational services to go to work. Moreover, it requires that the states provide these services if they are needed to help such recipients go to work.

Last year, the General Accounting Office reported that many sanctioned welfare recipients, especially the disabled, do not understand the reason for their sanctions. As a result, I am particularly pleased by the provision in this bill that requires states to make overtures to sanctioned families to help them understand the rules of the welfare program. More importantly, the bill prohibits the sanctioning of children if their parents do not meet TANF

program requirements.

I fully endorse both the "TANF Reauthorization Act of 2001" and the "Next Step in Reforming Welfare Act" because they are important first steps toward improving our welfare system. Welfare should not just be a safety net for working families, it should also be a springboard out of poverty.